NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE

CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD

TRANSITION TO ORGANIC PRODUCTION

(Acre)

CODE 789

DEFINITION

Utilizing agricultural management strategies while transitioning from conventional to organic farming techniques.

PURPOSE

This practice is applied as part of a resource management system to minimize negative impacts of agricultural production on soil, water, air, plant, animal and social and cultural resources by transitioning to organic production. Organic production is a system that responds to site-specific conditions by integrating cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that foster cycling of resources, promote ecological balance, and conserve and enhance biodiversity.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies:

1. Wherever the farming operation transitions to organic production;
2. To all practice components necessary to make a complete system are specified;
3. Where natural resources are/will be adequate to properly follow an organic production system;

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

A transition to organic production plan shall be developed. This plan shall be a component of an overall conservation plan. All methods of transition to organic production must be integrated with other components of the conservation plan.

All methods of organic production must comply with Federal, State, and local regulations, including the Organic Food Production Act of 1990, as amended (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.), and regulations with the National Organic Program final rule (7 CFR Part 205).

Management practices shall be used to prevent crop pests, weeds, and diseases including but not limited to:

- Crop rotation and soil and crop nutrient management practices
- Sanitation measures to remove disease vectors, weed seeds and habitat for pest organisms
- Cultural practices that enhance crop health

An appropriate set of mitigation techniques must be designed and implemented to minimize potential environmental risks of transition to organic production management activities in accordance with quality criteria in the local Field Office Technical Guide. Mitigation techniques include practices like filter strips and crop rotation, and management techniques like application method and timing.

In conjunction with a conservation plan, the number, sequence and timing of any tillage operations shall be managed:

- To maintain soil quality and limit soil loss at or below the soil loss tolerance (T) or any other planned soil loss objective.
- In conjunction with other sediment control tactics and practices, in order to minimize sediment loss to nearby surface water bodies.

Livestock shall be managed to minimize impact to nearby surface water bodies.

Greenhouse, orchard, and nursery operations shall be managed in conjunction with other sediment control tactics and practices, in order to minimize impact to nearby surface water bodies.

The label shall be followed when applying allowed pesticides.

Buffer zones shall be maintained between organic and conventional fields.

Nutrients will be applied according to the conservation practice standard Nutrient Management (590) and Waste Utilization (633).

CONSIDERATIONS

Consider controlling pest problems through mechanical or physiogical methods including but not limited to:

- Augmentation or introduction of predators or parasites of the pest species
- Development of habitat for natural enemies of pests
- Removal of pest alternate hosts
- Nonsynthetic controls such as lures traps, repellants and growth regulators.

Consider controlling weed problems through:

- Mulching with fully biodegradable materials
- Mowing
- Livestock grazing
- Hand weeding and mechanical cultivation
- Flame, heat, or electrical means
- Plastic or other synthetic mulches provided that they are removed from the field at the end of the season.

Consider controlling disease problems through:

- Management practices which suppress the spread of disease organisms
- Application of nonsynthetic biological, botanical or mineral inputs.
- Removal of alternate hosts
- Implementing crop rotations
- Plant crops which are disease and pest resistant

Consider livestock management systems such as prescribed grazing and grass-based dairying to reduce the need for synthetic substance controls.

Consider prescribed grazing and grass-based dairying to minimize the size and scale of a necessary waste management system.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

The transition to organic production plan shall be prepared in accordance with the criteria of this standard and in keeping with standards for individual system components and shall describe the requirements for applying the practice to achieve its intended purpose.

As a minimum, the transition to organic production component of an organic whole farm plan as defined in 205.201, the National Organic Program, shall include

- Plan map and soil map of managed fields;
- List of all practices and procedures;
- Materials used;
- Monitoring procedures;
- Record keeping according to conservation practice standards;
- Location of sensitive resources and setbacks, if applicable;
- Environmental risk analysis, with approved tools and/or procedures, for probable pest management recommendations by crop (if applicable) and pest;
- Interpretation of the environmental risk analysis and identification of appropriate mitigation practices and techniques;
- Operation and maintenance requirements.

Components. Components of complete transition to organic production management system may include, but are not limited to the FOTG Practice Standards listed below. Where contradictions exist between a practice standard and the Federal Rule embodying the National Organic Program (NOP), the NOP shall prevail.

- Composting Facility (317)
- Conservation Cover (327)
- Conservation Cropping Rotation (328)
- Contour Buffer Strips (332)
- Contour Farming (330)
- Contour Stripcropping (585)
- Cover Crop (340)
- Critical Area Planting (342)
- Fence (382)
- Field Stripcropping (586)
- Hedgerow Planting (422)
- Mulching (484)
- Nutrient Management (590)
- Pasture and Hayland Planting (512)
- Pest Management (595)
- Prescribed Grazing (528)
- Waste Utilization (633)
- Windbreak/Shelterbelt Establishment (380)

Design criteria for individual components shall be according to standards in the Vermont Field Office Technical Guide and organic management criteria as approved by a USDA accredited National Organic Program certification agency.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

The transition to organic production component of a conservation plan shall include appropriate operation and maintenance items for the client. These may include:

- Review and update the plan periodically in order to incorporate new technology and follow the Organic Food Production Act of 1990, as amended (7 U.S.C. 6501 et seq.), and regulations with the National Organic Program final rule (7 CFR Part 205).
- Maintain mitigation techniques identified in the plan in order to ensure continued effectiveness.

REFERENCES